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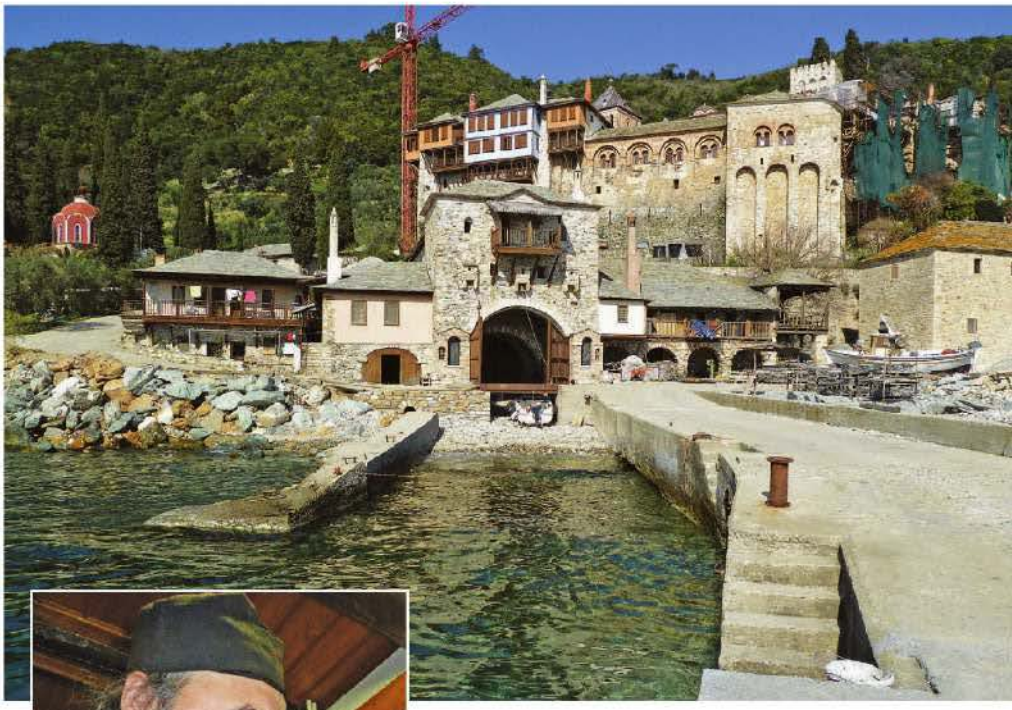
How's DX?

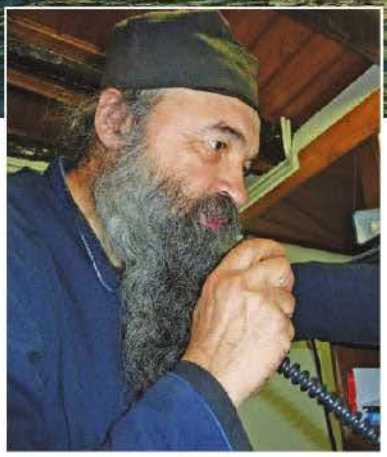
Remembering Monk Apollo, SV2ASP/A, Mount Athos' First Ham

Located in the mountains of northeastern Greece on the Khalkidiki peninsula are 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries called the "Holy Mountain," "Athonite State," or, as most Amateur Radio operators call it, "Mount Athos." The peninsula measures some 50 kilometers (31 miles) and is between 7 and 12 kilometers (4 – 8 miles) wide. The summit of Mount Athos is 2,033 meters (6,670 feet) above sea level.

Some might know the story about the area that says Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, along with John, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, were sailing to Cyprus and had to drop anchor on the coast of Mount Athos. Mary was stunned by the beauty and asked God if this could be her garden. A voice was heard saying, "Let this place be your inheritance and your garden, a paradise and a haven of salvation for those seeking to be saved." From that point on, the land was off limits to other women.

In the seventh century, Orthodox monks from Egypt came to Athos. The 20 monasteries making up the autonomous theocratic state are governed by a "Holy Community," led by a four-member "Holy Administration" with the top monk holding the title of "Protos."





▲ The Docheiariou Monastery was founded in the 10th century and was home to Monk Apollo for four decades.

◀ Monk Apollo enjoyed operating CW, SSB, and RTTY in his spare time. Often during the afternoon, he would keep his radio on and just listen.

Mount Athos DXCC Status

Mount Athos was not on the original post-World War II DXCC list from November 15, 1945. It was added after the following announcement in the February 1973 issue of *QST*:[1]

> Official announcement is hereby made of the addition to the ARRL Countries List of Mt. Athos. Located on the eastern peninsula of [Khalkidiki], Greece, Mt. Athos is a community devoted to religion and nothing else. [As] a Theocratic State within Greece, [it has a] distinctively separate administration with relation to the rest of Greece. Consideration as a separate entity on the ARRL Countries List is therefore made under Point 1 of the Criteria…

QSL cards could be submitted for DXCC credit for contacts with Mount Athos beginning March 1, 1972, and afterwards. The first operation from Mount Athos was by Din, SV1DB; Bill, SV0WII (WA6BWB), and Vince, SV0WJJ (WB4USR), as SY1MA in October 1972. Once Mount Athos was added to the DXCC list, there were multiple DXpeditions there through 1991.

Monk Apollo

Kostas Karzis was born in northwestern Greece, near the town of Preveza, into a large family. After completing school, Kostas "followed the path of complete dedication to Christ and became a monk in 1973," remembered his close friend Kostas Stamatis, SV1DPI. Kostas Karzis became Monk

[1] G. Hart, W1NJM, and E. White, W1YL, "Operating News," *QST*, Feb. 1973, p. 98.

Apollo and served in the monasteries of Myrtia and Proussos before moving in 1980 to the Docheiariou Monastery in Mount Athos.

During the spring of 1986, the Docheiariou Monastery had been without telephone service for over 5 months — not uncommon at Mount Athos. However, one of the monks had an eye injury. After 2 days, he was taken to the AHEPA Hospital in Thessaloniki, Greece. After hearing about this, Dr. Nikos Georgiadis, SV2RE, a professor of ophthalmology, recommended somebody in the monastery become an Amateur Radio operator to help with future emergencies. Monk Apollo heard the calling and became licensed as SV2ASP in 1988 as the first and only ham on Mount Athos. Almost 2 years later, the Holy Community authorized Monk Apollo to operate from the Holy Mountain.

During his early days as an Amateur Radio operator, Monk Apollo coordinated helicopter transport of patients to mainland Greece and assisted with communication when fires broke out in the area. SV2ASP/A was not a DXer as it didn't suit his monastic lifestyle, but he realized the significance of the rarity bestowed upon Mount Athos. He obtained DXCC number 36,223 in 1998.

In celebration of his 10-year anniversary of Amateur Radio operation, Monk Apollo was granted the special call SY2A to be used throughout the year 2000. On his QRZ profile, he wrote, "I have been sacrificing my very little spare time to make the voice of the Holy Mountain heard on the air and to give joy to a multitude of friends impatiently waiting for a contact."

During his tenure in Mount Athos, Monk Apollo met many Amateur Radio operators, including Valery Korzun, RZ3FZ, a Russian cosmonaut. The two had multiple contacts between the International Space Station and Mount Athos throughout a 6-month mission in 2002.

In September 2016, Monk Apollo was diagnosed with a brain tumor, which was removed. Since then, he kept up with his duties at the monastery and continued to be active on the bands. On May 5, 2019, at 2045Z, Monk Apollo became a Silent Key from complications of the disease. He was 64 years old. He is remembered by his fellow monks, friends, and the Karzis family.

The Future of Amateur Radio in Mount Athos

Monk Apollo's friend Kostas has the logs for SY2A and is working on trying to secure the logs for SV2ASP/A. In fact, QSL cards for contacts with SV2ASP/A are currently being sent from Mount Athos. Until further notice, it is okay to use the call book address of Monk Apollo.

Currently, there are at least 10 licensed monks living and serving in Mount Athos. In order to conduct accredited DXCC operation from the state, one must have an Amateur Radio license recognized by the government of Greece and transmit permission from the Holy Community of Mount Athos in writing. Read Peter Vekinis', KH6VP, article, "A Pilgrimage to Mount Athos," in this month's issue of *QST* to learn about Monk Iakovos, SV2RSG — the first radio amateur on Mount Athos to receive such approval since Monk Apollo's passing.

▶ Monk Apollo celebrating Easter service in April 2011.

▼ Mount Athos towers behind Docheiariou Monastery on the Khalkidiki peninsula.

All photos courtesy of Rick Dorsch, NE8Z.

Wrap-Up

A special thanks to NE8Z, SV1DPI, and *The Daily DX* for helping to make this month's column possible. Don't forget to send your DX news, photos, and club newsletters to your DX editor at **bernie@dailydx.com**. Until next month, see you in the pileups! — *Bernie, W3UR*